

Family Treatment Court Program

Vision

To promote the health, safety and welfare of children in the dependency system by actively intervening to address the drug, alcohol and other service needs of families through integrated, culturally competent and judicially managed collaboration that facilitates timely reunification or an alternative permanency plan.

Goals

King County Family Treatment Court (FTC) has four primary goals:

- To ensure that children have safe and permanent homes within permanency planning guidelines or sooner;
- To ensure that families of color have outcomes from dependency cases similar to families not of color;
- To ensure that parents are better able to care for themselves and their children and seek resources to do so; and
- That the cost to society of dependency cases involving substances is reduced.

Population focus and risk information

FTC is a King County program and partners with Region 4 Division of Social and Health Services to serve children in the entire region. FTC can serve up to 45 children at any one time whose parents meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Be willing to admit to the court that his/her child is dependent; or have an existing dependency finding on his/her children
- Be chemically dependent and willing to go to treatment;
- Be 18 years of age or older;
- Be a resident of King County and agree that they will not move out of King County for the duration of the program;
- Be willing to sign a Consent to Release Confidential Information Form so that the team may share information with other team members and outside community providers;
- Have the ability both mentally and physically to fully participate in the program;
- Not have any violent or sexual criminal guilty findings (including weapons charges); and
- Applications/referrals to FTC must be received no later than six months from the date on which the dependency petition was filed.

There are currently 35 children and 26 adults in FTC. Since FTC started in August 2004, a total of 82 parents and 111 children have been accepted into the program. Approximately 72% of children currently in FTC are living with at least one parent or relative caregiver.

Most of the Family Treatment Court participants are female (83%). Of the female participants, more than two-thirds entered as single head-of-households.

Ethnicity of parents (as identified by the parents):

- | | |
|--------------------|-----|
| • Caucasian | 65% |
| • Native American | 21% |
| • African American | 10% |

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- Hispanic and Other 1%
- Asian/Pacific Islander 4%

Ethnicity of the children (ethnicity as identified by their parents):

- Caucasian 31%
- Native American 28%
- African American 28%
- Hispanic 6%
- Multi-ethnic 6%

Not surprisingly, families enter the program with multiple needs. Besides chemical dependency, the most frequently reported are related domestic violence, mental health concerns, and lack of stable housing. As of February 2008, eighty-six percent of parents were unemployed upon entering FTC and over half were without permanent residence.

Program description

Judge Carol Schapira is the current presiding judge of King County Family Treatment Court. Family Treatment Court is an alternative to regular dependency court and is designed to improve the safety and well being of children in the dependency system by providing parents access to drug and alcohol treatment, judicial monitoring of their sobriety and individualized services to support the entire family.

Parents voluntarily enter the program and agree to increased court participation, chemical dependency treatment and intense case management in order to reunite with their children. Case review hearings initially occur every other week and then become less frequent as parents progress through the program. Incentives are awarded to recognize parents' achievements and graduated sanctions are used when parents violate program rules. It is expected that parents will remain in the FTC between 18 months and two years. If a parent is unable to engage in services or maintain sobriety, the process has prepared the court for quickly finding the best solution for the children.

Through a collaborative, non-adversarial approach, the Family Treatment Court integrates substance abuse treatment and increased accountability into the process. The court's first preference is always to help reunite children with their parents or primary guardians or to find children a stable environment with their own relatives.

Each family has an FTC team that reviews parents' participation and recommends services. This interdisciplinary team is cross-trained and works collaboratively to resolve issues. The team includes: parents' attorneys, assistant attorney general, DSHS social worker, substance abuse counselor, treatment liaison, CASA and/or child's attorney, FTC program manager, and the judge.

Program strategy

Family Treatment Court is organized around the principles of therapeutic courts and incorporates evidenced-based strategies as shown below.

- Integrated Systems: Parental substance abuse treatment in combination with enhanced judicial oversight and accountability are integrated within the traditional dependency case processes established under Chapter 13.34 RCW.
- Intervene Early: Program eligibility determination, chemical dependency assessment and treatment program enrollment will be completed during shelter care when possible.

- Comprehensive Services: Services follow a complete continuum of care and includes chemical dependency treatment (detoxification, residential and outpatient services), individual counseling, case management, therapeutic child care and other services based on the unique needs of each family.
- Increased Judicial Supervision: Initially, case review hearings occur every other week and become less frequent as the parent progresses through the program.
- A Holistic Approach to Strengthening Family Function: In addition to substance abuse treatment for the parents, parent and child-focused ancillary services will be accessible.
- Individualized Case Planning: Case planning for parents, children and the family will be based on comprehensive assessments of each.
- Ensuring Legal Rights, Advocacy and Confidentiality: All legal rights of parents and children are afforded pursuant to the dependency statutes under Chapter 13.34 RCW and records confidentiality laws pursuant to Chapter 13.50 RCW and related statutes.
- Regularly Scheduled Staffings/Court Reviews: Prior to a review hearing, the Family Treatment Court team convene to review those cases appearing in court that day.
- Graduated Sanctions and Incentives: Incentives are awarded to encourage and recognize a parent's progress through the program. Conversely, a system of graduated sanctions is used when parents violate program rules.
- Measuring Program Outcomes: Program data will be collected for purposes of analyzing program efficiencies, outcomes and effectiveness.
- A Collaborative, Non-Adversarial, Cross-Trained Team: Increased collaboration and communication is believed to lead to better teamwork and ultimately to better outcomes. The FTC team is committed to teamwork and participates in cross-discipline training, retreats and other events on a regular basis.
- Judicial Leadership: Research indicates that the relationship with the Judge is a major influence in whether a person will remain connected to a program and ultimately become clean and sober.

Social Workers also carry smaller caseloads than average. Each social worker can serve up to a maximum of 15 children whereas a typical child welfare worker caseload is about 21. Additionally, FTC relies heavily on Wraparound Coordination which is a best practice model supported by King County Mental Health, Chemical Abuse and Dependency Services Division. Wraparound Coordination is not a service but a process in which the Wraparound Coordinator helps the parent identify natural and professional supports and facilitate family team meetings. The meetings result in a single, coordinated care plan, based on the strengths and unique needs of each family.

Disproportionality and cultural competency

A 2005 report conducted by Wanda Hackett Enterprises and the University of Washington, Northwest Institute for Children and Families was commissioned by the King County Child Welfare Disproportionality Initiative to identify: 1) where disproportionality exists and to what extent; and 2) what factors contribute to disproportionality within the child welfare system. This analysis determined that children of color constitute one-third of the King County child population, but make up more than half of all children currently in foster care. African American and Native American families are the most significantly impacted, being over-represented at nearly every decision point in the child welfare system. For example, at the decision point to file for dependency or termination of parental rights, it was found that children of color are more likely to be placed and remain in out-of-home care. Racial disparity grows the longer these children stay in the system. African American and Native American children make up:

- 8 percent of the child population in King County (2005 data)
- 25 percent of the children involved in referrals accepted for investigation
- 33 percent of all children removed from their homes and placed in care
- 50 percent of the children still in out-of-home care 4 years after placement

Strategies to address disproportionality

One of FTC's goals is to ensure that families of color have similar results to families not of color. To achieve this goal, FTC has identified the following strategies.

1. **Reduce bias in decision making** by involving family in the decision making process through wraparound and family team decision making at all steps in the process.
2. **Increase access to culturally appropriate services** by collaborating and building relationships with community-based service providers. FTC relies heavily on team meetings and regularly invites service providers to these meetings. The Treatment Liaison also has direct contact with counselors at most residential and outpatient agencies including those that specialize in treating specific populations.
3. **Increase availability of permanent homes** by having lower caseloads and having regular team meetings. FTC social workers are better able to connect with family members to identify relative caregivers and alternate visitation providers and thereby increasing the number of available placements.
4. **Ensure that the team is culturally competent and demonstrates a commitment to cultural competency.** FTC Family Care Plans (treatment plans) incorporate the family's culture into their goals, objectives and strengths and needs. FTC team members regularly attend cultural competency trainings. Additionally, two current FTC Social workers were transferred from units specializing in services to African American and Native American families (OAACS-Office of African American Children's Services and ICWA-Indian Child Welfare) and have an established relationship with these units as well as an understanding of the specific needs of each population. Several FTC team members and stakeholders (including judicial officers, defense attorneys, CASAs, social workers and our assistant attorney general) are involved in system-wide initiatives to improve the child welfare system and reduce disproportionality.

King County Superior Court is actively involved in several activities and initiatives committed to reducing disproportionality and increasing cultural competency in the child welfare system and juvenile court:

- **Child Welfare Disproportionality Initiative**, a coalition convened in 2004 committed to understanding and taking action to address racial inequities in the King County child welfare system.
- **Model Courts Advisory Committee** established to guide implementation of the Washington State Court Improvement Project's recommendations, guided by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court best practices, including strategies to address the impacts expected as a result of recent chronic neglect legislation.
- **Disproportional Minority Contact**, an oversight committee has been established to develop strategies to examine and reduce disproportionate contact and detention of youthful offenders.
- **Cultural Competency Strategic Planning Committee**, to develop a five-year plan for improving cultural competent service provision across Juvenile Court Services

Coordination and Partners

Family Treatment Court has developed relationships with many local service providers including Seattle Indian Health Board, Thunderbird Treatment Center, Perinatal Treatment Services, Prosperity Treatment Services, Evergreen Treatment Services, Community Psychiatric Clinic, Eastside Domestic Violence, YWCA, and Harborview Addictions and Trauma Services. FTC strives to build relationships with each provider in order to coordinate services and provide increased access to services and increase engagement in services.

Family Treatment has also formed formal working relationships with the following agencies:

- **Washington State Department of Social and Health Services**
Division of Alcohol and Substance Abuse
Division of Child & Family Services
- **King County Department of Community & Human Services**
Mental Health, Chemical Abuse and Dependency Services Division
Office of Public Defense
- **University of Washington**
School of Medicine
Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences
Division of Public Behavioral Health Sciences and Justice Policy
- **Valley Cities Counseling**
Wraparound Coordination
- **Sound Mental Health**
Treatment Liaison Position

Improvement in access to services

As detailed above under Program Strategy, the Family Treatment Court model results in improved access to services for families in the Dependency System. Examples of benefits that exist in Family Treatment Court but not in the regular dependency system include the Treatment Liaison position, Wraparound Coordination, lower case loads of social workers, increased judicial supervision and having a non-adversarial team working toward a common goal.

Evaluation and cost effectiveness

A process evaluation of the Family Treatment Court conducted by the University of Washington's Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Public Behavioral Health Sciences and Justice Policy Division was completed June, 2006. The University of Washington started a 3-year outcome evaluation design including a cost-benefit analysis in May, 2007.

A recently published NPC Research report (February, 2007) compared outcomes of 250 FTC participations to those of similar parents who did not receive FTC services across four jurisdictions. Children of FTC parents entered permanent placements more quickly and were more likely to be reunified with their parents. FTC parents entered treatment more quickly, stayed in treatment longer, and completed more treatment episodes.



Funding/resource leverage

- Family Treatment Court started in 2004 with a 2-year grant from the Bureau of Justice. The grant was extended for 6 months and eventually expired on June 30, 2007.
- The program leverages over \$380,000 annually (including 4 social workers through DCFS, DSHS).
- Bridge funding of \$200,000 was received from the Levy for calendar year 2007.
- Implementation and operation of a Family Drug Court is a requirement of the state legislation that allows counties to impose the 1/10th of 1% sales tax.
- Upon approval of this legislation by the King County Council in 2007, FTC will receive an increase in budget starting in 2008.